

THE BYSTANDER —★—

Welcome to the Manosphere

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When asked if he could think of any laws “that give the government the power to make decisions about the male body,” Brett Kavanaugh, now a Supreme Court Justice, hesitated. It was obvious that the Senator who asked that question was highlighting the fact that government legislates the bodies of women, specifically our reproductive systems, but does not mandate any limitations on the bodies of men, even though they initiate half of the procreation process.

A friend who, like me, is an Army veteran and a mother, was sitting next to me at a conference table last fall when we brought up the now-famous question that had been asked during the confirmation hearings. When the man we’d been speaking with mentioned that some men believe conscription into the armed forces is an example of government taking power over the male body, we were dumbstruck. We had ever heard such a flawed, contorted logical fallacy---that forcing men into military service is analogous to being forced to continue every pregnancy. When Judge Kavanaugh answered the question during his Senate hearing ---what laws the government has made about the male body---by saying “I’m not thinking of any right now,” I would assume he does not believe his being drafted qualifies as an example of the government using its power to make decisions over his manhood.

So when I read last month that a federal judge in Texas ruled that excluding women from Selective Service registration is unconstitutional, I wasn’t surprised to see that the case was brought before the court by a “Men’s Rights” group---the National Coalition for Men---arguing that the male-only policy causes harm to men. But I *was* surprised that there were no women’s organizations supporting the suit, arguing for the same finding; that it causes harm to women if they are not required to register alongside men.

In 1981, when President Carter reactivated registration for the draft and asked Congress to allocate funds for it, he recommended that women be

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included. Instead, Congress specifically provided funding only for men to register. That led to the Supreme Court challenge, *Rostker v Goldberg*, which upheld men-only registration because women were barred from serving in combat. Requiring both genders to register was endorsed at that time by the National Organization for Women, and later, the administrations of both Clinton and Obama. In 2015, the US Military opened all positions, including combat jobs, to women, ending the rationale for excluding them from involuntary service.

Enter the “Manosphere,” defined by Oxford Dictionary as “websites and blogs where men express opinions about issues..... especially those associated with views that are hostile to feminism and women's rights.” Another website, Dictionary.com, further describes it as “full of misogyny, and overlaps with parts of the alt-right.” The men’s rights group that initiated this case is famous for posting online photos of “false rape accusers” if the claim is dismissed due to lack of documentable evidence. A recent post on its message board reads “*women have been no more discriminated against because of their sex than men have.*”

This backlash-laced forum is where aggrieved men complain that women want to be equal to them, yet still demand “perks” like prenatal health care, tax-free sanitary napkins, contraceptives, child support, and to have rape kits processed. The most virulent voices rage that they should have the “right” to have sex with women even against their will. Five mass shootings in recent years have been by men who identify with “Incels” (involuntary celibates), attacking random women in retaliation for spurning their biological needs.

It’s as if every time women win a “right” previously denied to us by the government, a bell goes off in some mans’ head that he has lost one of his rights, as if it was a zero-sum sports game where her gain threatens a loss for him. Perhaps the women’s movement over-did the “male-bashing.” Perhaps, according to another Supreme Court Justice, “all we ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks.” Yet, in spite of rampant sex discrimination, I know of few women who dislike individual men just for

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being men, and there are many women who prefer men for friendship, over women. How people (both men *and* women) behave within their *group* identity is unfortunately the thing that needs to be changed. Gender equality is still evolving, for all of us.

But returning to the question as to whether government legislates the reproductive rights of the male as it has with the female anatomy.

The answer is that it has not---ever. Government continues to use its power to make laws that restrict, not protect, the needs and decisions of only women. Meanwhile, we have had to protect ourselves from statutes that have given men a voice over everything from our earnings to our organs. Ironically, it would be far more effective to regulate men, who are capable of procreating far more often, and far more irresponsibly, than women.

Alongside licensed medical professionals, women should be trusted to make crucial decisions about their bodies without interference from politicians. And women---who create life often at the expense of their own health, freedom and livelihood, and who have never initiated the warfare that has killed hundreds of millions of living people---are not the ones who need a law to order them to protect life.